

# CAM'S ANGLE

Cameron Smith may not boast the broad shoulders of his namesake—the State of Origin Maroons and Melbourne Storm star—but his globetrotting, Augusta-bound future looks extremely bright.

*By Paul Prendergast*

**A**ustralia's newest 'baby-faced assassin', 21-year-old Cameron Smith, announced himself to the world around a brutal Chambers Bay layout in June, finishing in a tie for fourth in the US Open Championship in his first appearance at a major championship.

Smith's final hole heroics belied his unassuming demeanor, pounding a 265-metre fairway wood approach to the par-five 18th which that off the slope behind the hole and came to rest less than a foot from the hole for an eagle.

To the cacophonous roars of thousands in the stands around the green, Smith strolled onto the baked putting surface, tapped in for a round of

two-under 68 and a monumental change in his life moving forward.

Smith's \$407,000 payday guaranteed his immediate playing future on the PGA Tour for the remainder of this season and membership for 2015/16. His world ranking surged 76 places to No. 89 and he can also start hunting for rented digs at Augusta next April and a return to the US Open at Oakmont next year.

However, two weeks prior to the Open, Smith was virtually unknown outside his homeland despite making 10 starts on the PGA Tour as a non-member in the current wraparound season.

Qualifying for the Open at Sectionals the week prior to the championship, Smith slipped quietly around Chambers Bay with rounds of 70-70 to comfortably make the cut, but it was only after

shooting 69 on Saturday to sit in fifth place that the world started to sit up and ask: "Who is this guy?"

Many of his countrymen at Chambers Bay were in the same boat and the four Australian press members on site at the Open, myself included, started to be quizzed by colleagues from around the world on his upbringing in south-east Queensland, his ascension to national squads and winning an Australian Amateur Championship before turning professional at age 19.

Smith's big break occurred in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia last October when he finished fifth at the CIMB Classic, co-sanctioned with the PGA Tour, which brought him to America on a quest to earn enough money through sponsor invitations to earn full membership.



His result and payday at Chambers Bay sealed the deal, however, and the sky is now the limit for the affable yet steely determined Australian.

Yet, you wouldn't have known if his progress during the championship and the potential career implications flowing from it were playing on his mind in any way.

Smith appeared totally unaffected by his surrounds, at least until after his closing round when an element of shock had set in, and had appeared no more excited than on Saturday afternoon when presented with a box of meat pies and sausage rolls that Australian journalist Ben Everill had flown in from Los Angeles for all the Australian players.

'You can take the boy out of Australia but ...'

**Cam, you told us after you played that brilliant second shot for a tap-in eagle on the 72nd green at Chambers Bay that you really needed to go back to the hotel room to absorb everything that had just happened. Back home in Brisbane a month or two removed, how does it feel now?**

It was good, it was a good week. I've come down from the clouds a little bit. I struggled to sleep the following week at the Travelers Championship in Connecticut, I couldn't turn my brain off, really.

But, it's starting to sink in now. It's still a bit surreal but it's awesome to be in that position, you know?

**What sort of reaction did you get that following week from the guys over there and since you've been home?**

Most of the guys were really nice, saying "well done" and "great shot into the last" and all that kind of jazz. It was kind of awesome to have people that you kind of look up to say that sort of stuff.

I got back to Brisbane on the Wednesday after the Travelers and we had a little party on the Saturday night.

It was good to catch up with everyone. I think I was away for five to six weeks so it was kind of good to be home.

**You probably caught some of the other Australian players at Chambers Bay off guard with your performance too. I spoke to Adam Scott and he was excited you were playing so well but confessed not to know much about you.**

I've met Jason [Day], I met Adam briefly at I think Congressional or Colonial last year but, yeah, I haven't really met or spoken to a lot of them yet. Jason, Marc Leishman and Cameron Percy I know pretty well, they're all nice guys.

**Can I take you back to the Hong Kong Open in October 2014. You had status on the Asian Tour but you finished top 10 there in what was a co-sanctioned European Tour event. Did it cross your mind that the European Tour might be a pathway for you after that?**

To be honest, no, I didn't really think about Europe.

The goal from the start of the year was to get into the CIMB Classic in Malaysia (on the PGA Tour). That's all I'd been thinking about the whole year and what I'd been working towards.

**"It was good to fly under the radar a little bit. There's not as much pressure on you and you can just sort of go about your business a bit more."**

I had a few good weeks in a row there in Asia (in consecutive events from September, Smith recorded top 10 results twice in Asian Tour events in Chinese Taipei, Malaysia, Japan and Hong Kong) before that and ended up getting a spot and everything sort of changed from there.

**So at the start of the year, you saw the CIMB as pivotal to your goal of getting to the PGA Tour and you went on to not only qualify for it, but finish tied for fifth?**

I think that the US Open was a really good week and a lot of good stuff happened there but the key to all that has happened was that week in Malaysia. It was great to get the opportunity and then be able to take it and progress from there.

I went in just to see how I'd go and wasn't really expecting any of it but it was good to get across the line.

If I hadn't have done well there, I would have continued to focus on Asia and a little bit more in Europe and then back at home. My goal again would have been the same for this year, try to get into the CIMB again and go from there.

**Getting back to Chambers Bay and the US Open. You qualified late through Sectional Qualifying, so I'm guessing you only got your first look at the course just before the championship?**

We flew in on the Saturday beforehand and did most of our prep over the weekend and then took it pretty easy Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and was really fresh for Thursday.

The course was tough and I haven't played any other US Opens but I'm gathering every US Open is like that. So as simple as it sounds, the plan was just to hit fairways and greens.

I know that sounds dull and maybe even stupid, but it worked.

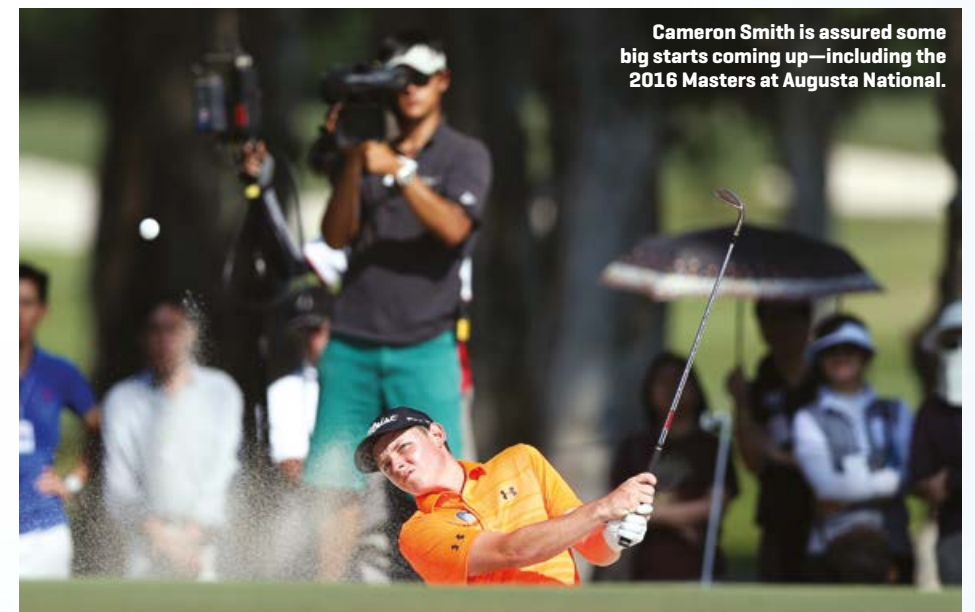
**You said to us during the championship that your goal was to try to have 18 pars a day and see where that got you.**

There are courses that you can attack a bit more, but at Chambers Bay, we took a step back and played a bit more defensively than previous weeks and just tried to hole as many putts as we could.

However, I think the key to the week for me was driving the ball well, though. I drove it really well and if you gave yourself some chances on some of the easier holes out there, you can make a birdie. But, definitely being on the fairway was the key.

It was not so much a shot-shaper's course, it was more of a shot-maker's course. You had to hit a lot of low shots and a lot of high shots. It wasn't so much drawing or fading the ball, it was more controlling the flight, which played into my hands a little bit, which was nice.

It was something similar you'd play in Scotland or the UK. You've got a fair idea of how far it is but you kind of throw



Cameron Smith is assured some big starts coming up—including the 2016 Masters at Augusta National.

out the yardage book and, you know, just play a shot.

**After rounds of 70-70-69 in relative anonymity, all of a sudden you're in the third to last group on Sunday with 2010 Open Champion Louis Oosthuizen, a group in front of eventual winner Jordan Spieth and Branden Grace.**

It was good to fly under the radar a little bit. There's not as much pressure on you and you can just sort of go about your business a bit more. Absolutely, though, the crowds were a little bit bigger on Sunday and the atmosphere was pretty cool.

Louis (Oosthuizen) was a good guy, he didn't really say much but we were kind of just chatting and that calmed me down a little bit.

After the first hole (Smith split the fairway with his tee shot but his wedge approach trickled just over a ridge behind the flag, from where he three-putted for bogey), a little hyped, I sort of got over it and got back in the zone and played from there. It was nice.

**You were holding your own with Oosthuizen on Sunday before he started an**

**amazing run of birdies from the 13th, while you dropped a shot on the short 15th from the front bunker.**

He played awesome that back nine, it was awesome to watch, actually. Bogeying 15 kicked me up the arse a little bit but watching what he was doing sort of got me away from worrying about anything else, which I think was a positive in all of it.

I said after hitting that shot to the last for eagle, with the noise from the crowd, I've never experienced anything near that before. That was awesome.

**Your caddie Dan Quinn played 14 seasons in the National Hockey League and now caddies on Tour. When did you start working together and, being an elite sportsman himself, has that been of benefit to you?**



Our first tournament was Torrey Pines (the Farmers Insurance Open in February, won by Jason Day) and we've worked every tournament from there.

During the week and on the final day at Chambers Bay, he didn't really show much emotion and we were just going through what we've been doing all year, actually. Not changing any of it, not getting too amped up and all that kind of jazz, definitely helped me out.

**And your schedule now for the rest of 2015, now that there is some pressure off with unlimited sponsor exemptions available to you?**

I'm going to play the European Masters then I'll come back and if I'm still inside the top 100 in the world, I'll play the PGA Championship at Whistling Straits and the tournament after, the Wyndham.

That's what it's looking like at the moment and I can't really see that changing for the rest of the year. As a non-member, I'm not eligible for the FedEx Cup playoffs.

If everything goes to plan, I'll play the first couple of tournaments of the new PGA Tour season from October and then come home to play at the end of the year.

That's the plan.

**Obviously when you achieve what you have over the past month, you've reflected on the support from back home from your family, Golf Australia and your coach, Grant Field.**

Ever since I was in Golf Australia's national squad from maybe age 15 or 16, Brad James in the high performance unit, all the services they provide and obviously helping me out with funding, I don't think I'd be where I am today without them, for sure.

So far as working with my coach Grant Field, I'll still come home as much as I can and there's no point in changing what works. Even if I end up spending more time in the US and we have to do video through email or Skype, that's just the way it's going to be.

I can't see myself changing, especially if it keeps going like it is, keep improving. I just have to keep doing the little things better and if I do that, there's not much point in changing.

**Lastly, Cam, did the pies and sausage rolls go down well on Saturday night at Chambers Bay!?**

[Laughing] I didn't touch the pies till Sunday night! I figured, we ate at the

same place in Tacoma every night, during the week, I had the same meal every night so I wanted to keep it going one more day.

It was good to celebrate with a pie afterwards, though, that's for sure.

Smith intends to look around the United States a little more to try to work out where he might want to base himself for his assault on the PGA Tour over the next 12 to 18 months. He says he's hasn't been over in the US enough to know where he might like to live but he's in great hands with his management company, the Wasserman Media Group, who also represent Day's interests.

On the golf course and around the PGA Tour scene, which can be a daunting experience for rookie players, Smith is starting to feel more at ease which can only auger well for his future prospects.

"The biggest thing is getting comfortable with new people; that was the biggest thing that I had to get over," he said.

"Earlier in the year, I didn't feel as comfortable as what I did on the Asian Tour that's for sure. But I've made a couple of mates out of it and now I'm feeling like I belong." ■

**"I can't see myself changing, especially if it keeps going like it is..."**